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AUTHOR Crawford, Robert H.
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ABSTRACT

There is a wide range of communication needs in rural development programs, including the need to develop comprehensive communication strategies for program fulfillment. Such strategies call for communication specialists whose expertise transcends the "information" role and includes the whole process of development. This process must not neglect an analysis of communication support factors such as audience, bureaucracy, and consumers; and decisions about program interrelations, program messages, media selection, overall implementation strategy, timing, and feedback and assessment. These aspects of a development program are at least as important as the technical aspects, and require equal care and attention in planning and budgeting. (CMV)

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COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT.

#7 Robert H. Crawford

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Forward

For those who look upon the communication part of an action program as involving largely a campaign of messages directed toward clients or consumers, this paper by Dr. Carwford presents an important additional dimension to communication.

Many development programs have run into problems of poor coordination in meeting the needs of those they try to meet. As Dr. Crawford points out, this may be a case of poor "development support communication." Development support communication includes such fundamental but often overlooked tasks as properly communicating to an agency's staff the reasons for undertaking a particular effort.

Crawford's paper and the referenced he cites are "must" reading for all administrators of action programs. They should also insist that their communication specialists create explicit "development support communication plans" as part of their overall communication strategy. Crawford's paper would be a guide for ideas on how to get started.

This paper was originally prepared for the Cornell-CIAT International Symposium on Communication Strategies for Rural Development, held at Cali, Columbia, March 1974. The author is an associate professor in the Department of Communication Arts in the N.Y. State College of Agriculture at Cornell University. He has spent considerable time in Asia dealing with problems of communication in development programs.

Developing a Communication Support Program

by Robert H. Crawford
Cornell University

This paper attempts to set forth the range of communication needs in rural development programs, and the need to develop comprehensive communication strategies for their fulfillment. Such strategies call for communication specialists whose expertise transcends the "information" role and includes the whole process of development. This aspect of a development program is at least as important as the technical aspects, and requires equal care and attention in planning and budgeting.

The Problem

Over the years, especially since World War II, billions of dollars in both government and private funds from many nations have been expended to help some of the world's nations "develop" their economies and societies. Tens of thousands of specialists have labored to introduce high yield variety grains, irrigation, improved hygiene, literacy, and other innovations. Most of this effort has been in the context of massive government "programs", often with some form of foreign assistance.

But all too often the programs have failed to reach their goals. The failure has been blamed on inadequately trained change agents, obtuse government bureaucracy, an unmotivated peasantry, and a multitude of other causes. While the causes are obviously complex, it seems clear that one common thread that runs through many of them is inadequate communication.

When planners concern themselves primarily with the technical aspects of seeds, sanitary toilets, or new school buildings, and think of communication only as the final step from the field worker to the farmer or villager, the project is already in deep trouble. Such projects are carried out by large bureaucracies, and moving the organization to the appropriate action at the right time is the first communication task. It can only be done by conscious design and the specific allocation of resources.

Since a major project may take several years in the planning phase, the communication aspects are often ignored in the early stages. Too late, the information people are informed of their task, only to find that key items have not been provided for in the budget.

The Role of Communication Support

Erskine Childers, a pioneer in the field of development support communication, notes that development is not something that planners "do" to rural people through communication. Development is something that rural people themselves do, or it does not happen.

> The need is not merely to get farmers and their families to feel "involved" in a project, though such sense of involvement is vital; nor merely to "participate", as if this were optional. The need is to help farmers and their families to act as the implementers -- to adopt (usually) quite specific innovations in their life-patterns and/or production techniques which are the whole purpose of the projects.[1]

Rural development involves change in patterns of life and thought. Armed with macro-statistics, higher education, and substantial budgets, planners develop "programs" aimed at helping the rural masses. Assuming the objectives are indeed viable and valuable for the people concerned (a question that merits separate examination!), it would seem simple just to explain to the peasant farmer and he would then adopt as desired.

But life is not so simple. There are layers of bureaucracy to be convinced and enlisted first. Are there field workers? Does the program make sense to them? Will they faithfully transmit the necessary concepts and information? About a year ago I visited a family planning field worker near Taichung, Taiwan. I was accompanied by an interpreter and by the district public health nurse. Toward the end of a relaxed and informative interview, the field worker decided to ask some questions of her own. "Why do people say that families should stop with three children?" she asked. "Everyone knows that's too small a family." The district nurse chimed in that she wondered about the same thing. (Observe that this was Taiwan, with one of the best government family planning programs in the world. We were

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[1]Erskine Childers and Mallica Vajrathon, "Support Communication in Rural Development Programmes." (Paper at the Second World Food Congress, The Hague, June 16-30, 1970.

within one hour's drive of the headquarters of that program, and were talking to two women charged with primary responsibility in carrying it out. But it did not make sense to either of them.) I suggested that if a man has five sons and five hectares of land, each son will have only one hectare to inherit and that won't be enough, but they replied that one son will inherit the land and the others will go to the city to work. We talked some more and I hope I gave them something to think about, but I know they gave me a lesson.

Adequate communication support for rural development is essential to the success of any program, it must start with the people who are to carry the program out, and it must be included in the total planning process from the outset. The budget for communication should be as carefully prepared and fully detailed as those for supplies or foreign aid.

Analysis of Communication Factors

It would be well if the communication specialists had some role in the initial deliberations as to what programs deserve priority, as they hopefully are close to the mind of the people through their feedback systems and systematic studies of the various audiences.

In any case, once a program is determined there must be early and thorough consideration of :

Who need to know

What

How (through what means) and

When (in what order).

How much will this effort cost, in time and budget?

The Audiences

A very common mistake is to fail to identify the specific audience or audiences to be reached, and the specific messages needed for each one. Who needs to know? With a given innovation it usually happens that several audiences must be reached, each with its own message and through means appropriate to it. Failure to differentiate the audiences and messages and correctly match them up with appropriate media usually results in a loss of efficiency, and may result in program failure -- or even a backfire.

Does the program seek better nutrition through diversified home garden plots? Obviously the farmer himself must know about the idea, how to plant and care for the garden, the necessary fertilizers, pesticides and other inputs, the costs and benefits, and how to use the different crops in his diet.

If district field staff are to inform the farmers, the field staff must be trained and equipped to do so.

If they are to shift emphasis from other established programs and procedures, their supervisors must know of the program, and be convinced.

If field reports are to reflect credit on the supervisors through reports on successful completion of this program, the regional and central administrators must understand the importance of the effort and make clear their concern to those below them.

If workers in other ministries (e.g., health, information, education) are expected to participate in any way, the communication

analysis must extend horizontally, and then vertically within those other ministries. Insofar as possible, a sense of participation in an overall national effort far larger than parochial agency concerns is essential.

Each of these groups may be viewed as a separate audience, and a sub-program should be devised to transmit the appropriate information, at the appropriate time, in each case. In general, emphasis tends to be on communication to the ultimate consumers of the information -- the peasants. But in terms of what we have been saying, the bureaucracy is a category of major importance.

The Bureaucracy. The first concern must be the preparation of all aspects of the bureaucracy. Within the bureaucracy, for instance, introduction of a new high yield variety seed might be mainly the province of the Agriculture ministry, but it will also probably touch the affairs of the home and nutrition specialists of the Health ministry if it is to be introduced into the diet, the economists of the Commerce ministry if it is to enter export trade, and even the Ministry of Transport if it will involve new shipping patterns to market. Cooperation among these agencies is not automatically to be expected. It may touch on pre-existing rivalries, and raise questions of who should initiate action in these other ministries. Indeed, though it may be given top priority in the Agriculture ministry, where will it rank in Health, Commerce, or Transport? If it is not given sufficient priority in these companion ministries, the project may fail for lack of some vital supporting input. Therefore a conscious program of communication within the structure of the government in lining up the needed support and informing and

enlisting all who need to know and be involved is the essential first step.

There may be cabinet-level decisions and decrees, inter-agency executive seminars, brochures and manuals (plus conferences and in-service training) for the field staff, and many more efforts for the various levels to be reached. -- and this must be an ongoing effort. Sometimes there can be periodic meetings on the subject, or it can be part of regular staff meetings. A newsletter may be helpful (if it is of a nature that will be read and heeded).

If field workers will need to train paraprofessionals, there should be specific plans for how they will do this, and the necessary communication aids (flip charts, films, brochures) must be provided for in the overall plan.

In any case, it is definitely not to be assumed that an order at the top will be sufficient to launch the bureaucracy into effective and faithful action in regard to a given innovation. I recall a period in the Philippines in 1956 when the Church World Service organization was distributing large quantities of Wisconsin cheddar cheese, packaged in seven pound cans. Virtually no work was done to educate anyone as to how to use it, since cheese was on the market and was known to be a delicacy in the Philippines. But it was overlooked that the only type of cheese in general use there at that time was a very mild cheddar, sold in small cans, and relatively expensive. The middle and upper class people who bought it usually served it as a snack on special occasions. Very few really knew how to use it as a

staple in the diet. Large numbers of people threw it away when they opened the cans because "it was spoiled" --(because that is what the sharper taste signified to them). Furthermore, if a seven pound portion was not used rather rapidly, it would indeed spoil in that climate. But the people did not know how to use it in any quantity. In a staff meeting of the Federation of Churches, the Director of the Department of Rural Life advised his colleagues that "it is good when you put a little of it in soup." The Director of the Family Life Department also had no insight as to how to use up such a large quantity as a significant source of protein in the diet. Both of these people had prominent roles in the distribution organization. How could they be expected to communicate effectively about the proposed innovation?

The Consumers. How will the field worker reach the ultimate "consumer" -- the one who is expected to innovate, adopt, or abstain? Here again, it is essential to differentiate. Who needs to know? The farmer is an obvious target, but how about his wife? She may have to learn new habits if she is to incorporate the product into the diet. And she is usually sensitive to the responses of her family. Do the children dislike the taste, or is it hard to digest? Are new recipes needed? Do her parents object to the new method of preparation, which they say violates custom? Do her friends say that even if this new variety of corn is more nutritious, corn is only for pigs and beggars to eat? Thus it is clear that in this example, "consumers" would include the farmer, his wife, children, parents, friends, and even possibly market vendors whose advice may be

important in the initial decision to actually use the product.

In reaching these various consumers, once they have been identified, what materials and training will the field worker need? He should have the film-strips, charts, samples, etc., in the training period and learn how to use them. --then go forth with these aids to perform his task. Definite means must be set up in advance to ensure that the field workers will have a steady supply of whatever communication aids are needed.

Inter-relations

Full recognition is needed for linkages between the proposed program and other programs or with factors in the cultural tradition of the people.

Productivity in rice harvesting can be improved by using small tractors, or even large hand scythes, instead of the small hand knives currently employed in many parts of Asia. But the "improved" methods sometimes violate spiritual concepts of Mother Earth and how one approaches her to take a harvest.

New high yield variety seeds usually require fertilizer, irrigation, pesticides, and other inputs. Will these be available, and on time? Will the regular commercial channels be sufficient to ensure this, or are government efforts needed? The cost of these inputs will be amply returned at harvest, but does the farmer need credit to finance them in the meantime? Where will he get it, and at what cost?

Among the mountain people of the Philippines, marriages and other special events are celebrated by a kanyao in which one or more pigs are ritually slaughtered and the whole village has a feast. The economic burden is often disastrous to the

"honored" family, so some missionaries began to actively discourage the practice. But when people began to discontinue it, signs of malnutrition developed; it turned out that the intermittent kanyao was nevertheless a major source of protein in the diet. This problem was met by the introduction of chickens and beans.

For a longer view of the overall task of communication in development in the face of cultural inter-relations, we may look at the task inherent in the worldwide efforts for population limitation. If people tend to operate in their own self-interest as they themselves perceive it, means must be sought to ascertain how in fact they perceive their self-interest in relation to family size. This varies widely from culture to culture. Where desired family size is larger than can be absorbed (in the aggregate) by the particular society, means must be found to enable the individual to re-evaluate his own interests so he will be motivated to modify his behavior accordingly.

If he wants many children to ensure his economic security in old age (with a small contribution from each), pernaps he can be helped to see that two or three well-educated and healthy children can provide even better for him in retirement.

If his self-image of masculinity is proportional to the number of children (whether legitimate or illegitimate), perhaps with appropriate communication this norm can be modified over time to include the factor of how well the children are provided for. Better one son who is a doctor or engineer than ten who are laborers or peasant farmers.

If his religious belief calls for his eldest son to ensure the repose of his soul by lighting the funeral pyre, perhaps

(over time, and with the cooperation of many religious and cultural leaders) this norm can be altered so that the most prominent child (of either sex) can perform this function. If fully adopted, such a shift would reduce the desired family size (on the average) by half. Any degree of adoption would reduce the number of children deemed necessary for spiritual survival.

The Message

At the inception of planning for the project the basic analysis should be made. What is the main message, and what variations must be made for specific audiences? For each audience, the message should stress the advantages and disadvantages to the person addressed of the proposed innovation. For the members of the bureaucracy, this would include institutional concerns (how success of this effort will make his district look good) and the relationship to other ongoing programs. For consumers, the details vary but the principle is the same. What will it mean to him (--or her)?

If the subject is family planning, clearly different messages are needed for men than for women. --and what about the grand-parents? Legislators, editors and other "influentials" also comprise select audiences that require individualized attention. In Cattaraugus County, New York, the County Health Department launched a family planning clinic on a provisional basis in 1972, but many members of the County Board of Supervisors were hostile to the plan and were expected to kill it when the regular budget came up for consideration. Dr. Royal Colle, of Cornell, was asked to serve as a consultant. It was hypothesized that these men did not fully understand the purposes of

the clinic, the real need, and the implications for the county (social, economic, and political). Accordingly, they were seen as a special audience and a campaign was devised for them. About fifty officials and other leaders were lent cassette tape recorders for one month. A specially prepared series of four weekly newsletters, each accompanied by a cassette with interviews of Cattaraugus County residents and discussion of issues as they related to the county, were mailed to them. Scholarly evaluation of this effort was not possible, but it should be observed that they did vote to support the clinic with the full amount requested in the budget.

The Media

What media are available? Too often we think only of field workers and mass media. What else is there?

Demonstration plots are well known in agricultural extension work, but are not often thought of as "media" -- but they are indeed a means by which a message is transmitted to an audience. Their use must be well planned, however, both in the technical aspects of the demonstration and in communication about it. Audiences should be given the opportunity to compare the old and the new ways and to observe the net gain from the new way -- and of course there should be full opportunity to ask questions and discuss all aspects of the innovation. Many other media are used with less frequency, but can be effective if used in the right way at the right time.

When there are village fairs in the area, displays or booths can be set up as information centers for the program. Such a booth can be a combination of distribution center for

literature and samples, and a base for interpersonal communication as people are invited to bring their questions.

Endorsements by leading figures, while dependent on other media, is an important communication approach. The main thing is to have the most credible person make the endorsement. Imagine the worldwide impact if John Wayne were to endorse a campaign for vasectomies!

Popular music can be a valuable vehicle, especially if it is in the idiom that is indeed perceived as local in the area. (It is doubtful if The Beatles would have much effect in Java with a song about dental hygiene, even if their music were frequently played there. But a recognized Javanese singer might be worth a try.) Indeed, many forms of folk entertainment and drama may lend themselves to development communication. In Indonesia, various forms of the wajang (an ancient puppet theater) have been used for both political and developmental purposes and there are current attempts to use them for the modern family planning effort. [2]

Phonograph records or tape cassettes can be used in many ways. If the target audience generally does possess the playback capability, simply making records available with a pleasing mixture of popular entertainment and information can be effective.

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[2] Robert H. Crawford and Ronny Adhikarya, The Use of Traditional Media in Family Planning Programs in Rural Java. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, Department of Communication Arts; #2 in Papers in Communication series, 1973.

Experiments are being continued in New York by Dr. Colle, and pilot studies are being prepared in Malaysia and elsewhere, in giving playback units to selected rural families and then supplying them with tapes on a regular basis. Results so far indicate that they do listen, they learn, and that they invite their neighbors to listen and learn also. Loss or damage to playback units has been minor.

Such efforts, of course, depend heavily on careful attention to ensuring cultural compatibility and acceptability. The material must be to the point of felt needs of the audience, must be presented in a way that engenders credibility on their part, must reflect care in use of language, idiom, style of communication, and attention to structural features of the audience, to the history of similar innovative attempts, and to the ability of the population to absorb innovation.

Another way of using records or tapes would be to supplement the efforts of the field worker. He may have specific training in one or more areas but with a library of tapes he can be prepared to give authoritative and helpful information on a wide range of subjects without message distortion. Such tape libraries can also be attached to MCH clinics or other places where people must spend time waiting. While waiting, they are open to listen and to talk with others who are waiting. Places where friends gather to talk, such as coffee shops or mosques are also possibilities.

But whatever media are used, full provision must be made for producing the required radio programs, film strips, tapes, or whatever by the appropriate specialists and on schedule. Since

these things cost money, provision must be made in the original planning budget. Ordinarily they cannot simply be subsumed under the information ministry's regular budget.

The Strategy

Once the assessment of communication-related factors has been made, an overall strategy is to be developed. The plan should start with the end goal (e.g., elimination of intestinal parasites) and then itemize means toward this end (e.g., adoption of sanitary toilets, deeper wells, instruction in sanitation). Once the means have been selected, the communication specialist must apply all that is known about the specific audiences to see what communication inputs will be required to move toward the end goal. In this framework, factors such as motivation, timing, and appropriate media fall in place, as well as the necessary feedback and evaluation.

More broadly, the value of this specific development project must be weighed against those in other sectors (e.g., improvement of nutrition, or the eradication of malaria) in order to develop an overall developmental strategy for the country.

The plan should include specifics of what training will be required, when, and by whom; what sort of equipment will be needed, its cost, plans for maintenance and repair; the films, filmstrips, pamphlets and other program "software" that will be required, who will produce it, and its cost. This is the point for a thorough assessment of how much the communication effort will cost in time, resources and effort. The plan should be

tied in with the timetable for other aspects of the proposed program so that when the innovation is ready for actual introduction there will be trained workers ready to do the job, backed up by a knowledgeable and enthusiastic bureaucracy and ample communication aids and supplies.

> Beyond this, Schramm notes that "the really basic strategies of developmental communication are not merely communication strategies at all but are economic and political, and grounded deep in the nature of a society. How fast do we want to go is an economic and political decision that determines the purposes for which communication will be used at a given time and how fast communication itself must be developed to help do the job. What ideology do we want to develop into is a politico-economic question that must be answered by the leaders, a question that will determine much of the content of communication, as well as the degree of central control over communication, the proportion of persuasion as opposed to control to be expected, and the extent to which the people will be helping to make rather than merely putting into effect a plan of change."[3]

Starting with the answers to such questions (either stated or implicit), the development communicator builds his strategy for informing and persuading the various sectors of society to be reached.

Timing

Which audiences need attention first, and should the messages be phased? In a broad-based fundamental education project, the literacy campaign may start first. Based on an estimate of likely progress, a sanitation project may be readied to start four months later and another project involving improved methods of planting

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[3]Wilbur Schramm, "Communication and Change" in Daniel Lerner and Wilbur Schramm (eds.), Communication and Change in the Developing Countries. Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1967, p. 27.

rice may be timed two months later to coincide with the start of planting season. Each one of these phases will need various communication aids (pamphlets, film strips, mobile film vans), and these must be scheduled in advance with as much care as ensuring that the necessary seeds and fertilizer arrive on time. If the program is regional or national, it may well involve the use of radio. This would involve coordination with another ministry, in many countries, and far enough in advance to enable script writers and producers to prepare the programs, and the program schedule to be adjusted to accomodate them.

Another aspect of timing is mentioned by S.C. Dube, writing of efforts in India:

> The timing of communication regarding particular items may be inopportune. In one development block of the state of Bihar, as a part of the malaria eradication program, all the houses were sprayed with DDT. This was a well-intentioned step, but its timing was unfortuante. Spraying was done early in October, and soon after, according to local custom, the houses were whitewashed for the Deepavali festival. In the process the efficacy of DDT was substantially lost. Naturally the experiment did not succeed in eradicating mosquitoes from the houses.

In this case it is clear that "communication" included much more than the act of telling people about DDT. The spraying, with whatever explanations were needed to bring it about, was also a part of the process -- and it was here that the process broke down because of poor timing.

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[4] S.C. Dube, "Communication, Innovation and Planned Change in India," in Lerner and Schramm, ibid., p. 157.

Feedback and Assessment

Procedures should be built into the plan for constant monitoring while it is under way. How is it actually operating? How is it being received? Are there rumors that need correction? Are the various persons who have roles actually performing them as planned?

In major family planning programs, such as in Taiwan, field workers fill out a three-part form for each person who has agreed to adopt the IUD (the most commonly used method). One part is retained by the field worker for her follow-up records and the client takes the other two parts to a doctor for examination and insertion. The coupon entitles her to a 50% reduction in the standard fee for the service. The doctor completes the data on the second part and forwards it to the program headquarters, retaining the third part for his own records. The second part, of primary interest for program feedback, contains the client's name and demographic data, names of the field worker and doctor, type and size of loop inserted, and previous family planning method (if any). This data is fed to a computer, which then can provide:

: accounting information, upon which to pay doctors for their services and bonuses to the field workers,

: efficiency data, which will show which field workers are more effective, which doctors are more active, which clinics are overburdened and which ones are under-utilized.

: soft spots -- areas of the country in which adoptions are lagging. A quick checkup may reveal damaging rumors, which can be quickly counteracted,

: comparison data. If one approach is tried in 1 or 2 provinces only, results can be compared with other areas.

Obviously, each rural development program will have its own sort of feedback. But however it is worked out, it is essential that the responsible agencies have direct knowledge of how the program is operating. This is because evaluation is not just something that needs to be done later in order to put the results in an annual report. Things hardly ever go precisely as planned, but if problems can be identified soon enough, corrections can often be made in time to save the project. Careful planning is vital, but nothing can substitute for the flexibility provided by an effective feedback system that will allow program administrators to know the status of the project at any time and to make modifications as they may be needed.

Some Additional Comments

1) In carrying out a communication support program for rural development, it must be observed that at all stages all relevant offices and individuals should be kept not only informed, but actively involved. This involvement should not be so active as to amount to interference in operations, but it should be sufficient so the other agencies and officials can feel that their ideas are respected and considered, and so they will also come into contact with other needs, pressures and points of view.

2) Such planning and implementation calls for people trained as communicators, and not just as "information specialists." The information specialist is commonly able to do a workmanlike job preparing press releases, radio scripts, etc., from whatever information he is given. He is apt to measure his success in terms of press releases issued, or minutes on the air.

The communication specialist, on the other hand, takes a broader view. He should be trained to think of the entire process from the conception of the program to the persuasion of each member of each target audience. He can think in "mass" terms, yet is able to carry the analysis to selected groups within the mass and he knows that rural development is not a "mass" phenomenon. He knows which mass media are appropriate for certain phases of the information task, but he is also able to turn to other media (or create new ones, if necessary) to reach segments of the audience that will not be reached effectively by the mass media.

3) "Communication" is a broad concept that includes much more than "publicity" or "information". It requires a study of the people involved, and their motivations and inhibitions. A decision to proceed with a program in the rural development area immediately calls for an analysis of the information that certain people need to receive and the means of transmitting it, but beyond that there should be arrangements through which the ideas and efforts of the rural people are actively sought and are meaningfully integrated into the ongoing program. In the final analysis, it is they who must "develop"; the whole rural development apparatus is designed to help them do it.

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